

Sermon to the Saints of God assembled at Topeka, KS: Sunday, October 25, 2015

Give Diligence to Make Your Calling and Election Sure (Part 2)

Today we will continue our study of Peter's exhortation to the elect of God, that we give diligence to make our calling and election sure (**2Peter 1**). As we discussed last week - a Christian is compelled to spend the days of their life laboring to bring forth fruit - visible evidence - that shows to themselves, and to others, that they have indeed been elected, and called of God. Peter tells us exactly how we are to do this: **2Peter 1:5-7 "5 giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; 6 And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness 7 And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity."** This is a building process. It is an edification process (to build up, to erect a house or building). We must begin with the unmovable foundation of Christ, and particularly our Faith in Christ, and then build, perfect, and maintain our spiritual house upon that foundation, by seeking the Lord to add, and increase these additional graces in us. Last week we considered the first two spiritual attributes that we are to add to our faith: Virtue (moral energy, moral courage), and knowledge. Adding these things gives us an energetic, enlightened, faith - they make our faith active, fruitful, and guided by the standard of God. Let's continue our spiritual edifice:

Add to Knowledge, Temperance

Brown: "The temperate man abstains from all forbidden, sensual pleasures, and is moderate in the use of even lawful enjoyments of this kind."

Henry: "We must add temperance to our knowledge. We must be sober and moderate in our love to, and use of, the good things of this life; and, if we have a right understanding and knowledge of outward comforts, we shall see that their worth and usefulness are vastly inferior to those of spiritual mercies. Bodily exercises and bodily privileges profit but little, and therefore are to be esteemed and used accordingly. We must be moderate in desiring and using the good things of natural life, such as meat, drink, clothes, sleep, recreations, and credit; an inordinate desire after these is inconsistent with an earnest desire after God and Christ; and those who take more of these than is due can render to neither God nor man what is due to them."

We can behave temperately, out of a sense of duty, or habit, or because we are trying to achieve some worldly goal, but this is not proof that our calling in election is sure. A lack of this temperance is bad fruit, and it speaks poorly to the state of a person's heart. However, the presence of it, is not at all proof that a soul HAS been called of God. This spiritual temperance is moderation, self-control, self-command within the mind, heart, and life, as it regards the things of this world. It is the right state of the thoughts,

affections, and behavior, toward temporal, worldly things. We must be able to take, or leave the things of this world, being always content with what the Lord has provided us.

1Corinthians 9:25 “And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.”

We are not temperate because of works righteousness, or because we are incapable of enjoying the good things in this world, but rather because we see their relative value as compared with the value of our eternal soul, and our inheritance.

Philippians 4:11-13 “11 Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. 12 I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13 I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”

The temperate Christian sees that the possession of wealth, honor, and worldly pleasures cannot make him happy, nor can the lack of those things make him miserable. Consider it like this: if suddenly you didn't have some earthly thing / comfort / enjoyment, how would that affect you? Would it be like ripping the hair off of your head? It shouldn't be! It should be like taking off a hat! We ought to have a loose grip on all of the things that we use in this world, willing at a moment's notice to let go of it entirely, without remorse! Remember Lot's Wife!

Brown: “[Worldly pleasures] cannot obtain for him the pardon of his sin; they cannot pacify his conscience; they cannot transform his character; they cannot give him strength in weakness, consolation in sorrow; they cannot save him from the pit of corruption, or the deeper pit of perdition; they cannot give life in death, or secure happiness forever; and the lack of them, though it may – in some cases, must – give him severe uneasiness, cannot deprive him of the favor of God, of the testimony of a good conscience, or of the hope of glory, honor, and immortality, beyond death and the grave. The views which, as a believer he has obtained, lead him to look on the prosperities of life with some measure of alarm. They appear to him polluted with sin, replete with temptation, pregnant of danger to his highest interests. With these views, he is temperate in all things. The world has not dominion over him: he is master of himself; and, being possessed of a far better inheritance than it can give him, he does not expect or seek on earth real, perfect happiness, which he believes to be in heaven secured for him there.”

2Peter 3:11-13 “11 Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, 12

Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? 13 Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”

All that we have in this life has been given to us – LENT to us – by our gracious God. It all belongs to him! Our gifts are not our own. Our wealth is not our own. Our time is not our own. Our children are not our own. Our health is not our own. Our very *lives* are not our own! The Lord God who loaned us these things, with an expectation that we would employ them in service to him, can recall that loan at a moment’s notice. We must have a temperate spirit about ALL of those things, such that we can truly be content and thankful toward God, when we have them, or when he takes them away.

Philippians 3:7,8 “But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. 8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.”

As we encounter trials, afflictions and persecution (because of the profession and exercise of our faith), we are bound to encounter the loss of this world’s pleasures. We are to take joyfully the spoiling of our goods (**Hebrews 10:34**), which will require that we:

Add to Temperance, Patience

Brown: “This patience is the proper way of bearing affliction, which has always, ultimately, been appointed by the hand of God. It implies that the suffering is felt – it may be, very painfully felt – but that it is, at the same time, willingly submitted to and cheerfully and thankfully borne. Pain, poverty, disappointment, bodily disease in endless forms, mental anxieties and anguish, loss of property, bereavement of relatives and friends, outraged feelings, a reputation blasted by calumny – these are but a few in the long catalogue of the ‘ills that the flesh is heir to’. If, amid sufferings from the hand of God, we habitually cherish a stupid insensibility, a sullen unsubmitiveness, or a proud stubbornness, which will rather be broken than bent, or a hopeless despondency – if we either despise his chastening, or faint when we are rebuked of him; and if, when suffering under the hand of man, we are entirely occupied with the immediate cause of our affliction, and have our minds filled with feelings of bitter resentment, and revenge – then it is evident that, whatever profession we may make, we have no ‘calling’ nor ‘election’ to make sure. Patience stands opposed to pride, insensibility, levity and thoughtlessness on the one side, and on the other to querulousness, discontent, depression and despair.”

Hebrews 10:32-37 “But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; 33 Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. 34 For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance. 35 Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. 36 For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. 37 For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.”

Psalm 37:7-11 “7 Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass. 8 Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil. 9 For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. 10 For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. 11 But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.”

Henry: “Add to temperance patience, which must have its perfect work, or we cannot be perfect and entire, wanting nothing (#Jas 1:4), for we are born to trouble, and must through many tribulations enter into the kingdom of heaven; and it is this tribulation (#Ro 5:3) which worketh patience, that is, requires the exercise and occasions the increase of this grace, whereby we bear all calamities and crosses with silence and submission, without murmuring against God or complaining of him, but justifying him who lays all affliction upon us, owning that our sufferings are less than our sins deserve, and believing they are no more than we ourselves need.”

Job 1:20-22 “20 Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, 21 And said, Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. 22 In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.”

Job 2:10 “But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips.”

This patience requires a continual acknowledgment that the cause of all things is from the Lord, that he is righteous in everything that he does, that he appoints affliction to

accomplish his own purpose, and that it will, indeed, be for the good of those that love him!

1 Timothy 2:8 “I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.”

We seek the Lord without wrath (that he has appointed affliction according to his own will), and without doubting (that the affliction is for our good, that God is sufficient for us in all things, and that he is able to deliver us!). We must control our spirits in the face of affliction! We cannot lash out at our loved ones, or our perceived afflictors – our perceived enemies - because we are angry with our lot. We cannot say that we are patiently bearing a burden, and yet be bitter and discontent toward God, and envious of our fellow man. We must humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God!

James 1:4-7 “4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. 5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. 6 But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. 7 For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.”

Having added a proper spirit toward the things of this world – both good and bad – we are now able to:

Add to Patience, Godliness

This Godliness is to bring our thoughts, desires, and actions in line with the will and command of the sovereign God. We must view everything in our life with a godly perspective – pass every circumstance and question through the lens of the scriptures – the word, and revealed will of God in the earth. In order to do that, we must believe that God is (*faith*), we must have an energy and boldness to seek after the Lord (*virtue*), and *knowledge* of him, as seen in his word and his work. We must then have *temperance* and *patience* toward the good and bad things in this world, such that we are able to maintain a godly perspective, even when it will cost us dearly in worldly ways. Without knowledge, godliness is self-righteousness. Without temperance and patience, we are constantly at risk of twisting the scriptures in order to preserve our lives (or some aspect of our lives that we desire).

Mark 8:35-38 “35 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it. 36 For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? 37 Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? 38 Whosoever

therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

Brown: “Whatever God commands, the godly man does, because God commands it. He recognizes His authority to be paramount; and when the greatest among men command what is inconsistent with His commands, his language is, ‘Whether it be right in the sight of God to obey man rather than God, judge ye.’ ‘I will hear what God the Lord will speak.’ ‘Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.’ However the commandment of God may be opposed to the opinions of the wisest of men, or to his own previous opinion, the Christian unhesitatingly ‘sets to his seal’ that God is true – saying, ‘Let God be true, and every man a liar.”

Romans 3:3,4 “3 For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? 4 God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar.”

Every man includes me and you. We can deceive ourselves. A Christian must be constantly assessing whether his own thoughts are consistent with the plain words of the Bible. Get back to the words – follow them, and not what you want them to be!

Godliness must begin with a proper view of just what manner of Sovereign God we serve.

Daniel 4:34,35 “34 Him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: 35 And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?”

Coupled closely to that understanding of God, we must have an understanding of what manner of depraved creatures that we are!

Isaiah 64:6,8 “6 But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away ... 8 But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand.

A proper view of God, and of ourselves, breeds a proper spirit of reverence and meekness toward God, which is wrapped up in this concept of godliness.

2Timothy 2:24-26 “24 And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, 25 In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; 26 And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.”

That meekness does not eliminate the boldness of our virtue – instead, it makes certain that our boldness is not in our own cause, but that we are bold in the cause of the Captain of our Salvation - Jesus Christ!

Trapp: “And though in our own cause we must show all longsufferance, yet when God’s glory is concerned, it is our duty to be blessedly blown up with zeal for his name, as Moses was at the sight of the golden calf.”

A part of this godliness is recognizing the authority of our sovereign God – with that authority, he has appointed our earthly masters. We are to obey those in authority over us (**1Peter 2:13** “**Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake.**”). When those masters insist that we bow down and serve another God, then we must join with our brothers who said to the king: “O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter”! We are happy to suffer shame and affliction in such instances, seeing it is better to obey God, than men. However – we must be careful that we don’t turn that godliness into a cloak for our own rebellious hearts! We don’t get to turn every situation that we don’t particularly like into a self-righteous war. If there is any way that you can obey God AND our earthly masters, then you must do both! Those Hebrew children who would not bow down to Nebuchadnezzar’s idol did everything that they could to be obedient to their earthly master – they submitted themselves under the cruel, godless hand of the Babylonian king; were made eunuchs at his hand; served him with fidelity, and were careful stewards in his house and his kingdom – before coming to this moment when with faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance (willing to give their very lives), patience and godliness, they obeyed God, rather than men.

Add to Godliness, Brotherly Kindness (Brotherly Love)

To complete the spiritual house that we are to build upon our faith, we must look outward – if the exercise of our faith only pertains to our own hearts and lives, then it is dead, and fruitless – it is not truly faith; in that state we are hearers of the word, and not doers. Our faith must be social – displayed for the good of our fellow man. Therefore, we are instructed to add love, in two different forms. The first of these is brotherly kindness (brotherly love). The Greek word here is “philadelphia”; Strong’s: “the love which Christians cherish for each other as brethren”. This word comes from “philadelphos” (love as brethren), which comes from “phileo” (affectionate, approving love), and “adelphos” (brother). The word “philadelphia” appears 6 times in the

scriptures – every other place it is either translated as “brotherly love”, or “love of the brethren”. I’m fine with “brotherly kindness”, but want you to clearly understand that it is NOT something less than love – it is an affectionate, spiritual love, that can ONLY exist between the members of the household of faith! Having put on godliness, we should have the right spirit of meekness so that we can truly esteem one another better than ourselves (**Philippians 2:3**).

John 15:12-17 “12 This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. 13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. 14 Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. 15 Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. 16 Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. 17 These things I command you, that ye love one another.”

Brown: “This is the peculiar love which Christians cherish and display towards one another, as Christians. It is a love that only a Christian can hold, and it can only be directed toward those that he understands (by their fruit) to be Christians.”

To actually display this love to our brethren, requires fellowship, and communion with our brethren in the earth, which makes this instruction of utmost importance:

Hebrews 10:24,25 “24 And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: 25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”

Brown: “The brethren are to shew their love to one another by sympathy and relief. They are to visit each other in their affliction. They are to ‘remember those who are in bonds, as bound with them and them that suffer adversity, as being themselves in the body.’ They are to rejoice with each other in their joys, and weep with each other in their afflictions. They are to ‘use hospitality to each other without grudging.’ They are to ‘distribute to the necessities’ of the indigent brother – not to say to him, ‘be ye clothed, be ye fed,’ yet give him not the things needful for the body, though they have this world’s goods. They are to be kind, tender-hearted – forbearing and forgiving each other; assisting each other in their labours – bearing with each other’s infirmities – aye, not only bearing with, but bearing them, helping them to bear them. They are to ‘seek not every one his own wealth’ – well-being – ‘but every man also the well-being of his brother – his well-being in all the extent

of that word, and specially his well being as a Christian man – his deliverance from ignorance, error, and sin, in all their forms, and in all their degrees; his progressive and ultimately complete happiness, in entire conformity to the mind and will of God. For this purpose brotherly love will lead to mutual intercession – to admonition and reproof, when necessary, but always in a loving spirit. The Christian under the influence of this principle, will delight in his brother's Christian attainments and triumphs, as if they were his own; he will never be ashamed of his brother, however low his place is in society, and however he may be frowned on or persecuted by the world – never be ashamed to call him brother.

This love is sincere; 'with a pure heart'; 'without dissimulation'; love in deed and in truth, not just in word. It comes from a pure heart – it can flow from no other fountain, than one that is sanctified by God. It is fervent – 'Have fervent charity (love) among yourselves' – 'love one another fervently'. This love is intense, such that many waters cannot quench it! It must be permanent and constant – preventing wearying in well doing; so intense and persevering as to induce even the parting with life to gain its end, even as Christ laid down his life for the brethren. John 15:12, etc. This love is directed toward all of the brethren – it is certainly made more manifest toward those that we are assembled with, and that we are able to know intimately, but it is to be cherished toward all those who love the Lord."

Henry: "We must add brotherly-kindness, a tender affection to all our fellow-Christians, who are children of the same Father, servants of the same Master, members of the same family, travellers to the same country, and heirs of the same inheritance, and therefore are to be loved with a pure heart fervently, as those who are peculiarly near and dear to us, in whom we take particular delight, #Ps 16:3."

Psalm 133:1 "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"

Add to Brotherly Kindness, Charity (Love)

This second form of love, here called "charity", is the roof of our house – the pinnacle – the perfection! It is the culmination of all of the other spiritual graces that come before it. While brotherly love (and the fruit of it) is peculiar, and unique to those of the household of faith, this love (charity) is to be manifested toward all of our fellow man – our "neighbor". Why are these two forms of love separated out? The nature and manifestation of love toward our neighbor is, and **MUST BE**, different than the nature and manifestation of love toward the brethren. This love toward our neighbor, is a love born of mercy, and good will.

Brown: "Charity here is plainly not almsgiving, nor is it, what often absurdly receives the name, a disposition to think of men's character and spiritual state better than evidence warrants. Charity is love, and, contradistinguished as here from brotherly kindness,

describes the affection which Christians ought to cultivate and manifest towards their fellow-men, though they do not belong to the Christian brotherhood.”

Matthew 5:43-48 “43 Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. 44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; 45 That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. 46 For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? 47 And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? 48 Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

Henry: “Charity, or the love of good-will to all mankind, must be added to the love of delight which we have for those who are the children of God. God has made of one blood all nations, and all the children of men are partakers of the same human nature, are all capable of the same mercies, and liable to the same afflictions, and therefore, though upon a spiritual account Christians are distinguished and dignified above those who are without Christ, yet are they to sympathize with others in their calamities, and relieve their necessities, and promote their welfare both in body and soul, as they have opportunity.”

A little bit about “love” vs. “charity” vs. “brotherly kindness/love”. We have clearly established that there is a difference between the love of the brethren, and the love of our neighbor. 2Peter 1, standing alone proves the fact that these are two distinct things that are added to our faith. So what is charity? Does it always mean love of the brethren? It cannot, because in this verse it is set in juxtaposition of love of the brethren. So then, does it always mean love of our neighbor (which it clearly does in this verse)? It cannot, because it is used in several places (e.g. 1Peter 4:8, 1Peter 5:14) as the peculiar love of the brethren. I propose to you that the word “charity” in the KJV is not relevantly different than the word “love”. It is entirely dependent upon its context. Again, there are two different kinds of spiritual love in the scriptures: Love within the household of faith – between God and his adopted sons – purchased again by the blood of Christ, and between the members of that household of God; and then there is the love through mercy and good will that God’s people are to have toward our fellow man. We are to abound in BOTH of these forms of love. Charity is not a third category; it can be used in conjunction with either of the other two. The word is simply love, and it must derive its further definition from the context where it is used. The Greek word used here is “agape” (used 116 times in the NT); it’s verb form is “agapao” (used 142 times in the NT). Of these 258 occurrences, only 28 of them are translated as “charity” – the other 230 occurrences are simply translated as “love”. The Geneva Bible uses “love” for all of these occurrences

(except 1 – “feasts of charitie”). Bottom line: charity is love. Regardless of the form of the word (whether in English (charity, love, brotherly kindness/love), or in Greek (phileo, agape, agapao), the context is the key - it tells the story as to which of the two spiritual forms of love we are dealing with.

This love **MUST BE** the driver of our preaching of repentance to our neighbors – which is a primary fruit of this love, and a duty that we owe. Without this spirit of love, all of our works are as tinkling cymbals and sounding brass. God’s people have been the object of undeserved, and unmatched mercy. As such, we should **LOVE MERCY!** We should – unreservedly, and with a full heart – desire that same mercy which was given to us, while yet dead in our sins, be granted to our neighbors - our enemies. Without that heart of mercy and love, we will show ourselves as self-righteous, hypocritical professors, who would join in with the thankless man who had been forgiven a great debt, and yet demanded to his debtor “pay that thou owest!”

Micah 6:8,9 “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? 9 ¶ The LORD’S voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name: hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it.”

The fruit of this love does not begin and end with preaching truth to our neighbor (although that is a large part of it). It must also include active concern for their best good, and providing appropriate help for them when we have opportunity, assuming that we indeed have the ability to provide that help. For clarity, I would suggest that this is to be done when 1) it is not in connection with, or encouraging sin, 2) there is a sincere need that is not being otherwise met, and 3) we have both the opportunity, and ability to meet the need. This is not soup kitchen, vain glory theology. This is to be done as unto God – diligently, quietly, cheerfully. It is to be done wherever the opportunity presents itself – in the schools, at our workplaces, at the grocery store – **EVERYWHERE** that the people of God go, we must carry this spirit with us, and should exercise it.

Galatians 6:10 “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”

Consider now a couple of examples in the scriptures where godly men were rebuked by God when they failed of this love:

Jonah preached boldly to Nineveh, as God instructed him: “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown”. He didn’t want to do it – he was tired of bearing the reproaches of these exceedingly wicked people – he was vexed by their godless lives. I feel mightily for brother Jonah! He was convinced that God was going to destroy Nineveh, and he had his

dancin' shoes on, ready to praise God for that righteous judgment. However – by the providence of God, those people repented at his preaching, and God's judgment (from Jonah's perspective) was delayed. Jonah was in no mood to hear that:

Jonah 4:1-4 “1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. 2 And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. 3 Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live. 4 Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry?”

Then the Lord gave him an object lesson. He grew up a gourd (a plant) – in one day – to give shade to Jonah, and then he killed that gourd with a worm, and caused him to be exposed to the baking sun. Again, Jonah was angry:

Jonah 4:9-11 “9 And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death. 10 Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: 11 And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?”

Jonah had more love at that hour for a gourd, that had been in existence for a few hours, than he had for the lives and souls of millions of people, and a whole lot of prime rib. The fact is, we don't get to abandon our sincere love, because of our personal vexation and our personal injuries. Mercy, repentance, condemnation, and vengeance are the Lord's sole prerogative – it is ours to submit ourselves to his perfect will, and rejoice with humility, and thanksgiving. The Lord **“hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.” (Romans 9:18)**

Consider also, Jesus Christ's words to John and James:

Luke 9:52-56 “52 And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. 53 And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. 54 And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? 55 But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. 56 For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.”

Our job is to preach the gospel – to boldly, plainly preach against sin (cause them to know their abominations), and command repentance as the ambassadors of Christ in the earth. Vengeance IS NOT in the job description. Christ is MORE THAN CAPABLE of executing his wrath – he doesn't need our help in that matter.

Calvin: "Christ likewise blames his disciples because, though they are widely distant from the spirit of Elijah, {1} they rashly take upon themselves to do what he did. For Elijah executed the judgment of God, which had been committed to him by the Spirit; but they rush to vengeance, not by the command of God, but by the movement of the flesh. And therefore the examples of the saints are no defense to us, unless the same Spirit that directed them dwell in us."

Given all of this, it is easy to see that we can go straight off the rails into either a self-righteous hardness, or an ecumenical, sloppy agape, lie that turns the grace of God into lasciviousness. We better do NEITHER of those things! At the same time, we cannot shy away from a full understanding and practice of this love, because we are SURROUNDED by people who have deeply corrupted this love, and turned it into a satanic lie – Satan's own Gospel! This love DOES NOT mean that we rejoice in wickedness, encourage sin, or refrain from preaching and warning with great boldness and clarity. To the contrary, Leviticus 19:17,18 clearly tells us that warning our neighbor of their sin IS love. It must be done with a view of our own sin, and not a spirit of hypocrisy. This love does not mean that we kick against God's righteous judgments and vengeance; his prerogative to save by many or by few, his fixed determination to punish the wicked – indeed, we rejoice in the judgments of God, and are endlessly thankful for his mercy toward us. Being thus thankful - knowing that we were entrenched in our sins when the Holy Spirit did a work on our heart – we go forth with meekness before God, preaching repentance, as Christ taught us – commanded us - to do! That's what our spiritual forefathers have done. That is what Noah did – he preached righteousness. That was his goal – period. There were two results from that preaching - his house was saved, and the world was condemned – who was in which category was ENTIRELY the prerogative of God.

Why is this love the pinnacle of our spiritual house? Why is it the "greatest of these"? Because you cannot truly love your neighbor, if all of these other graces haven't first been built upon your faith; because it is the most contrary to our proud flesh, and the most difficult to maintain. When we are surrounded by people who are out for our blood on a continual basis, it is the most natural thing in the world to hate their guts. It requires virtue (supernatural energy and courage) to even continue to engage in this preaching; it requires knowledge to see to the end of our faith; it requires temperance to be unmoved by the deprivation of our worldly goods at the hands of wicked men; it requires

patience to endure suffering and affliction at the hands of wicked men; it requires godliness to have a proper perspective on it all, and to maintain the meekness whereby we see our own need for mercy; it requires love of the brethren, and the great blessings that flow from their communion, instruction, and counsel in the Lord. How altogether perfect! If we do not seek the Lord to increase each of these graces in us, then we can never attain to this love. If we do not seek the Lord to continually build upon, and perfect this love in each of us, then we will have a leaky roof, and our house will be ruined.

1Peter 2:17 “Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.”

Hebrews 12:14-16 “14 Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: 15 Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled. 16 Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.”

Why is this continual work so critical?: Affirmatively - “If ye do these things, ye shall never fall”; “if these things be in you, and abound, ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Negatively - “But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.”

These things must be in us (held, and continually perfected in our hearts), AND they must abound (they must bring forth good fruit)! Herein, we make our calling and election sure.

Henry: “When others shall fall into heinous and scandalous sin, those who are thus diligent shall be enabled to walk circumspectly and keep on in the way of their duty; and, when many fall into errors, they shall be preserved sound in the faith, and stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.”

We have not yet attained, my friends! The race is still being run! Please consider these matters - not in theory (as a hearer), but in practice (as a doer of the word). Let us all take stock of our thoughts, AND OUR DEEDS - which show our hearts on these matters. Are we behaving ourselves in a way that shows these spiritual graces? Are these things abounding in each of us? Are we making our calling and election sure (both to ourselves, and to others)? I submit to you that the answer cannot ever be “yes”, and then walk away content that we have attained. Consider in yourself, what needs maintaining, repairing, or rebuilding, and then GET TO WORK!

This process of building our spiritual house, is a continual, never ending process. We cannot opt out. We cannot decide that we are DONE with these spiritual 'building projects'! As long as we draw breath, we have this work to do – we must seek the Lord, asking that he will cause it to prosper. It is hard work, it is uncomfortable work, it is messy work. The moment that we decide we are done with this work, is the moment that our 'house' will begin to fall. It is the chastening of the Lord, which ONLY HIS SONS receive. It is the refiner's fire, whereby his people are prepared and purified. The heathen have no such changes, and are therefore are pickled in their sins.

Psalm 55:19b “19 ... Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God.”

The heathen are indeed content to rest upon their own wisdom, strength, and self-righteous notions and works. They want no part in this endless work, whereby we make our calling and election sure.

Jeremiah 48:11 “Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity: therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed.”

Be thankful for this laborious, uncomfortable work; despise not the chastening of the Lord. Through these processes, we are convinced, and reminded, that we have no strength in this flesh, and we are disciplined to understand our COMPLETE RELIANCE on the strength and righteousness of our God. Thank God for that!

I love you all. Amen.